

**Public Hearing Testimony
Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget – University of Connecticut
February 15, 2017**

Todd Vachon –UCONN Graduate Assistant and President of GEU-UAW Local 6950

Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Todd Vachon. I am a graduate assistant (GA) at the University of Connecticut (UCONN) in the Sociology department and President of the Graduate Employee Union, UAW Local 6950.

On behalf of 2,200 UCONN graduate teaching and research assistants I am here to express our concerns about proposed cuts to the University of Connecticut's operating budget.

As graduate assistants (GAs), our members are students but also employees. As a teaching assistant, I teach two undergraduate courses per semester, from course design through delivery to student assessment. In addition to my workload as a GA, I am working on my graduate degree to advance my academic career. The average annual salary of a UCONN GA is \$19,000, many of us have families and we all live off campus as taxpaying members of our communities. I myself live in Colchester and have three children, aged 10, 8, and 7.

We are here tonight because we believe that investing in UCONN is good for Connecticut. UCONN is critical to providing accessible, affordable quality higher education to Connecticut working families and is an engine of economic development and job creation. Its innovative research programs alone bring \$150 million to the state every year.

As GAs, we play a proud and critical role in these contributions by providing vital teaching and research functions at UCONN. We are intimately aware of how important our work at UCONN is for the state's citizens as well as stimulating the state's economy. For example, UCONN generates \$11.80 for every state funded dollar, supports 24,235 jobs and its alumni working in Connecticut earn an additional annual income of \$55.8 billion dollars.*

Our work as teaching assistants is critical to accessible, quality education for thousands of undergraduate students each year. This allows young people, 75% of whom are from Connecticut, to earn college degrees and go on to contribute to our economy. Our work includes teaching stand-alone courses in writing that are critical to informed citizenship; running lab sections for thousands of pre-med students who will go on to become doctors and engineers; and holding office hours, grading papers, and providing feedback that is critical to a quality educational experience.

As Research Assistants, we carry out experiments in wide-ranging innovative fields of research that bring \$150 million into the state. In addition to bringing revenue, this research helps stimulate the state economy through start-ups that grow out of the basic research done at UCONN. In fact, the overall annual impact of UCONN's research enterprise is \$373 million, which supports and sustains 2,081 jobs and brings in \$15.2 million in state and local tax revenue.*

As legislators, you have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to UCONN as the state's flagship university. You have shown that quality, affordability, accessibility and excellence are key components of our system of higher education in Connecticut.

In an era of science denial and the promotion of so-called "alternative facts," now is not the time to reduce the state's investment in higher education and the economic development fostered by UCONN's research programs.

From the frontlines of making UCONN a top-notch teaching and research institution, we urge you to invest in the future by maintaining full support for our university.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Vachon".

Todd Vachon
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President
UAW Local 6950

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**UCONN Annual Impact on the CT Economy. <http://economicimpact.uconn.edu/>*